

ON LOOKING INTO CHINGGALTAI'S GRAMMAR OF THE MONGOL
LANGUAGE

First there is the script:

gnarls of ancient wisteria;

better yet, blackberry canes

that hold their icy early-morning fruit

just above the dust of goldenrod.

As I lift the book as though to drink

sweet white mare's milk from it, I smell the hair-long

lemon-scented grasses of the steppe

braised by the hooves of Temujin's eight

isabella geldings.

Then I see, written in eyelets and curls,

the pronouns I have needed:

the inclusive 'we' bida, the exclusive

'we' ba. The first one is 'you and I'

sharing on this page a membrane-thin

cross-section of my heart, under microscope

a pomegranate freshly broken

spitting its scores of garnets from the cove

of a wine-washed rind.

The second is 'I and someone else'

who lay together that day,

our skin shaded by the blackberry's leaves

shaded by honey locusts, our mouths

black-purple with its fruit's nearblack juice,

as though stained with the ink of fresh new pronouns

as we took from each other a darker

sweetness. Yet a third pronoun behaves

as both masculine

and feminine, pronoun for angels,

who, we are told, are neither male

nor female. I would use it. I would speak

of the blackberry stain that stabbed through

your man's white shirt, making its birthmark

beneath, speak of how I lapped it from your flesh,

how goldenrod dusted your hair, how we cried

the same dove-throated cry that angels make.

-- Roger Finch

Tokyo, Japan